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Soviets spend billions on disinformation

Roy Godson on the Soviet Union's use of disinformation.

Roy Godson is a professor of government at Georgetown University, director of the Washington office of the National Strategy Information Center and serves as a consultant to the National Security Council. He was interviewed by Edmond Jacoby of The Washington Times.

Q: Pergamon Brassey's has just published "Dezinformatsia," which you wrote with Richard Shultz. The subject is Soviet "disinformation" programs. Explain disinformation.

A: "Disinformation" is one of two Soviet terms. Today they call it "active measures," which is the use of overt and covert techniques to influence, deceive and mislead the target. The intention is to affect his behavior, to get him to act in a way that is detrimental to his own interest and, at the same time, to act in a way favorable to Soviet interests.

Q: How does it differ from ordinary propaganda?

A: "Propaganda" has many different meanings and people use it in different ways, but the essence of propaganda is to tell the truth as one sees it. It is to project one's views in a favorable way, and to show how the other side or other point of view or other product is not as good as yours. "Disinformation" uses a combination of truth and falsehood. Sometimes you use more truth, and other times more false information.

In addition, propaganda is used to affect people's attitudes with the hope they will act a particular way. But "disinformation" is designed to lead to specific actions.

Q: You have done some research on the recent "Ku Klux Klan letter" to foreign Olympic committees. What can you tell us about it?

A: The letter allegedly written by the KKK to 10 or more countries in Africa and Asia . . . to discourage them from attending the Olympic Games was an example of "tactical disinformation" that was a part of an ongoing "strategic disinformation" campaign. It was a "tactical" move that had the initial objective of justifying the Soviet refusal to attend the Games, [suggesting] there were crazy people

in the United States who would assault or possibly kill foreign athletes. But this was part of a "strategic disinformation" objective the Soviets have been engaged in for decades.

The Soviets are trying to suggest — as they did in their TASS reports — that the KKK was just the extreme [expression] of the American government, that this was just an extreme manifestation of American behavior — and specifically that the Reagan administration has been encouraging these kinds of activities.

Q: Is it correct to say that the claim the KKK wrote the letters was accepted as fact around the world because people are predisposed to believe the KKK would do such a thing?

A: That is correct. A good "disinformation" officer will pick issues that seem plausible to the target. In this case, there is a KKK. It has engaged in terrorist activities. It is racist. It could conceivably have said some of the things [in the letter]. That was intentionally linked by TASS to the Reagan administration.

Q: Can you describe the clues in the letter that point to KGB involvement?

A: Sure. The evidence is very strong that this is a forgery. And without reference to any forensic information the government might have in this case. I think one can demonstrate that this letter was produced by a fairly skillful — but not terribly skillful — "disinformation" forgery specialist.

To begin with, the letter is titled: "The Olympics — For The Whites Only." Most Americans would have left out the article "the" [in front of "whites"]. And if you look at the emblem on the [letter] itself, you will see that it is allegedly issued by the "Ku-Klux Klan." The Klan does not use the hyphen when it refers to itself. Third, the emblem [on the letter] is generic: There is no reference to the "Klan in Virginia," the "Klan in Maryland" or the "Klan in Alabama." Generally, each of the [KKK] units that

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